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ABSTRACT

A corporate perspective on the general education competencies expected of middle management and technical personnel is provided and responded to in these three papers. First, Rita Meyer presents results from a study conducted by West Virginia Northern Community College to obtain the views of corporate managers on the general education competencies, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values needed by successful managers and technical personnel. Highlights of the study of 28 managers of firms with more than 300 employees included: (1) the main desired competencies were factual communication skills, cognitive skills, and inquiry skills; (2) ethics/personal integrity and human relations/interpersonal skills were also considered essential competencies for managers; (3) 16 of the 28 respondents felt community colleges should include a greater percentage of general education courses than are currently offered; and (4) 11 respondents cited lack of interpersonal skills as the most common reason for firing an employee. In response to Meyer's presentation, Donald R. Donell argues for a joint business/academic effort in developing general competencies on the part of the entire workforce and explores the advantages of a well-educated labor force; and John Andes urges community colleges to be as concerned with the retention and promotion of their graduates in the work place as with their initial placement and employment. (HB)

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DESIRED GENERAL EDUCATION COMPETENCIES:

A CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE

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APRIL 3, 1984

PRESENTED BY:

RITA MEYER, DEAN OF INSTRUCTION
WEST VIRGINIA NORTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

REACTORS:

DONALD R. DONELL, PRESIDENT
STARVAGGI INDUSTRIES, INC.

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JC 840 362

Rita Meyer

"DESIRED EDUCATION COMPETENCIES: A CORPORATE PROSPECTIVE"

New opportunities abound for general education in community colleges if new ideas are explored and new methods are developed to link, more closely, work and academic learning.

West Virginia Northern Community College asked the corporate leaders in their community to identify the essential general education competencies that should be included in the Associate in Applied Science degree. Specifically, twenty-eight corporate managers were asked what general education competencies (skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values) were needed by successful mid-management and technical personnel. A list of competency item statements was derived from a discussion paper, The Competent College Student, sponsored by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (Branscomb, 1977). Q-Methodology was used because Q-Sort provides an effective way of investigating individual beliefs, and the data can be analyzed more objectively than data gathered with less objective opinion methods.

Industrial respondents were selected on the basis of having 300 or more employees, and they represent a variety of manufacturing and service industries which deal with coal mining, healthcare, governmental service, chemical production, glass manufacturing, ready mixed slag and concrete, ceramic industries and utilities. They were asked to complete the Q-Sort, a standardized interview, and to participate in a culminating conference at West Virginia Northern Community College.

Q-Procedure imposes methodological constraints in that a respondent must sort a deck of cards and place the Q-Cards into a designated number of categories with an assigned number of cards in each category. In this study the following arrangement was used:

	Most Important			Desirable	Least Important		
Number of Cards	1	3	5	10	5	3	1

Each respondent was given twenty-seven competency cards and a blank card was provided so that respondents could add any competency or competencies they believed were missing. Respondents sorted the cards on the preference continuum with the stipulated number of cards in each category. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the items in the 28-item-Q-Sort. The means indicate that respondents agreed, on the average, that the essential competencies in a two-year degree should include those represented in the following table:

Mean Value of Item Placement for

28-Item Q-Sort

Card No.	Means	Competencies
10	4.71	Factual Communication Skills
23	4.46	Cognitive Skills
13	4.07	Inquiry Skills
28	3.89	Blank Card
18	3.82	Arithmetic Skills
26	3.79	Communication Skills
3	3.68	Critical Reading Skills
7	3.67	Technical Writing Skills
4	3.64	Self-Directed Learning Skills
1	3.57	Affective Skills
21	3.54	Computational Skills
2	3.35	Personal and/or Business Writing Skills
19	3.18	Technological Awareness
25	3.18	Literal Reading Skills
6	3.14	Information Locating Skills
24	3.04	Economic Awareness
8	2.86	Public Address Skills
15	2.86	Scientific Skills
27	2.79	Fiscal Awareness
9	2.54	Formal Research Skills
17	2.39	Citizenship Awareness
12	2.18	Government Structure Awareness
11	2.07	Figurative Reading Skills
20	2.07	Geographical Awareness
16	1.50	American History Awareness
14	1.46	Cultural Background Awareness
22	1.29	Literature Skills
5	1.25	Historic Awareness

N = 28

Item 28--Care should be exercized in interpreting the mean.

Nineteen corporate respondents completed the blank card and placed it in the most important categories. Their overwhelming response indicates that ethics/personal integrity and human relations/interpersonal skills should be included in essential competencies. When respondents were asked in the interview what additional competencies should be included in occupational/technical curricula, their response indicated that eighteen of the twenty-eight believe that ethics and human relations/interpersonal skills should be added to the critical competencies included on the cards. Additionally, when respondents were asked to identify which three competencies are weak or lacking in present mid-management and technical personnel, they cited human relations/interpersonal skills, communication skills (written and oral), inquiry skills and factual communication skills.

Industrial leaders consider general education competencies important, and 16 of the 28 respondents would include a greater percentage of general education than community colleges now include. At the present time, most community colleges have 25 to 33 percent general education in occupational/technical programs. Respondents in this study would increase the amount of general education because typically corporations have programs to teach technical competence, but lack the ability to teach general education content.

Middle-manpower workers need good interpersonal skills and ethics if they are to remain on the job. Eleven respondents cited lack of interpersonal skills as the most common reason for firing an individual, while 5 identified lack of ethics as the most common reason. Only 3 listed poor technical performance as the reason for termination. General education appears to be an essential part of technical training which helps one to remain on the job or move from that entry-level position to a higher position in the development of a career.

DESIRED GENERAL EDUCATION COMPETENCIES -- A CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE

DONALD R. DONELL
PRESIDENT
STARVAGGI INDUSTRIES, INC.
401 PENNA. AVE.
WEIRTON, W. VA. 26062

AS ONE WHO IS COMMITTED TO THE AMERICAN FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM, I EMBRACE COMPLETELY A CURRICULA WHICH ENVELOPS, ENCOURAGES, AND SHARPENS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS SO NECESSARY TO ANY SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS ENTITY.

TIME CONSTRAINTS PROHIBIT AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF SUCH A STATEMENT, AND MY GENERAL STATEMENTS WILL PROBABLY RAISE QUITE A FEW EYEBROWS; HOWEVER, IT IS OUR OBSERVATION THAT ANY SUCCESSFUL JUNIOR OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE MUST BE REFLECTIVE OF A JOINT BUSINESS -ACADEMIC EFFORT, WITHIN THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA SERVED.

TRUE, THERE ARE TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL NEEDS WHICH MUST BE ADDRESSED AND WHICH ARE NECESSARY; BUT BEYOND THAT, AND WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE MORE IMPORTANT, IS THE NEED FOR GREATER GENERAL COMPETENCIES ON THE PART OF THE ENTIRE WORK FORCE.

AS A CORPORATION, WE HAVE ENJOYED FAR GREATER SUCCESS AND PRODUCTIVITY WITH EMPLOYEES, WHOSE WORK MAY REQUIRE VOCATIONAL OR TECHNICAL SKILLS, BUT WHO ARE ALSO CONVERSANT WITH AND FAMILIAR WITH GENERAL AREAS SUCH AS BASIC ECONOMICS; LAW OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND; ENERGY DEMANDS OF THE COMMUNITY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OUR COMMUNITY, STATE AND NATION.

THESE INDIVIDUALS MAY ONLY HAVE A MINIMAL BASIC FAMILIARITY WITH THE VARIOUS AREAS, BUT EVEN THIS MAKES IT FAR EASIER FOR US TO EXPLAIN NEEDS FOR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY AT REDUCED COSTS AND THE METHODS BY WHICH THE SAME CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.

UNFORTUNATELY, WHILE WE AS A NATION HAVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AT OUR FINGERTIPS, WE HAVE AN UNBRIDLED TENDENCY TO CATEGORIZE, TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER AREAS.

WE HAVE HAD AN UNPARDONABLE RECORD OF STRESSING THE VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREAS, AND FRAGMENTING THE SAME FROM THE GENERAL COMPETENCIES. AS A RESULT, WE DELUDED OURSELVES INTO THINKING WE HAVE PERFORMED A SERVICE BY TEACHING A PERSON TO WORK WITH TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS, AND IGNORED THE OTHER PART OF THE PERSON.

WE NOW HAVE MECHANICS AND TECHNICIANS WHO ARE ILLITERATES, WHO CAN'T ADEQUATELY READ INSTRUCTIONS AND MANUALS, AND WHO BY AND LARGE PROCEED UNDER THE "TRIAL AND ERROR" METHOD, OR RELY UPON EXPERIENCES, AND WHO, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, COMMIT COSTLY MISTAKES.

AS A RESULT, WE HAVE NURTURED AND FOSTERED AN EXCELLENT "SEED BED" FOR THE GROWTH OF AN ADVERSARIAL ATMOSPHERE IN THE WORK PLACE, WHERE THEY MUST PROTECT THEIR JOBS.

YOU SAY -- THAT IS NOT THE MISSION OF A JUNIOR OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE. I SAY UNFORTUNATELY, YOUR COLLEGE MAY WELL BE THE ONLY INSTITUTION TO WHICH WE, AS A SOCIETY CAN TURN AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME.

THE FINDINGS BY THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION BROUGHT THE PROBLEMS TO EVERYONE'S ATTENTION WITH SIRENS AND FLASHING LIGHTS.

WHAT WILL RESULT FROM THIS STUDY WILL NOT BE KNOWN FOR YEARS, FOR THERE ARE AS MANY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS AS THERE ARE COUNTIES IN THE UNITED STATES.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE AS A NATION CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT, OR WE WILL CONTINUE TO DECLINE.

IF THE IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEEDED BASIC CURRICULA TO SERVICE THE PRESENT WORK FORCE IS ONLY TRANSITORY IN NATURE, IT WILL PROVIDE A MUCH NEEDED SERVICE UNTIL OUR SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEMS PERFORM WHAT IS NEEDED; AND HOPEFULLY, WHEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SYSTEMS DO IMPROVE, IT WILL OBVIATE THE NEED FOR YOUR COLLEGES, TO A LARGE EXTENT, TO DWELL UPON BASIC GENERAL COMPETENCIES AND PROCEED TO INSTRUCT ON AN ADVANCED LEVEL.

WHEN A WORK FORCE IS MADE AWARE OF THE FACTUAL REALITIES OF A FREE SOCIETY; THE NEED FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORK FORCE; AND THE PERSONAL PART EACH WORKER PLAYS IN THE SCENARIO; THEN PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT, PRODUCTION IMPROVEMENT AND MOTIVATION WILL OCCUR.

THIS AWARENESS MUST COME FROM THE ACADEMIC SECTOR, FOR WHEN YOU SPEAK, AND ACT, AND TEACH, YOU ARE RESPECTED. IT IS FROM YOU THAT CREDENCE FLOWS.

A WORK FORCE WHICH IS CAPABLE OF PROPERLY COMMUNICATING, BY THE SPOKEN OR WRITTEN WORD, CAN MORE EASILY UNDERSTAND AND BE UNDERSTOOD.

A WORK FORCE WHICH IS CAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THE DIRECT RELATIONSHIP IT HAS WITH COSTS, PRODUCTIVITY AND SUPPLY AND DEMAND, IS MORE PRODUCTIVE AND CONCERNED.

A WORK FORCE WHICH UNDERSTANDS THE HISTORICAL VALUES OF OUR COUNTRY AND SYSTEM, AND PARTICULARLY WHEN COMPARED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, IS MORE CONCERNED AND OBJECTIVE.

AS A MEMBER OF THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY, I HAVE THE OBLIGATION TO JOIN HANDS WITH YOU AND ACTIVELY PURSUE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PROGRAMS.

THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY MUST BE A PART OF THE COLLEGES TO DESIGN GENERAL COMPETENCIES CURRICULA, AS WELL AS THOSE INDIGENOUS TO THEIR PARTICULAR AREA, AND TO ENCOURAGE THE WORK FORCE AT ALL LEVELS TO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE SAME.

IF WE, AS A PART OF THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY ARE WILLING TO POINT OUT OUR AREAS OF CONCERN; IF WE BELIEVE THEM TO BE OF SUCH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES; THEN, WE MUST BE AS EQUALLY WILLING TO PARTICIPATE, AND NOT SIMPLY ANTICIPATE.

GENERAL EDUCATION COMPETENCIES IN COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGES: HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONSES

John Andes, Associate Dean
College of Human Resources & Education
West Virginia University
April 1984

Institutions of higher education have traditionally seen general education competencies for undergraduate students from the perspective of "what competencies should our students have when they graduate." This study opens up several new perspectives for universities to examine. Three possible responses include: a consumer orientation general education curriculum, better interaction with community junior colleges and applied research in graduate programs.

Instead of seeing general education for our students as that part of an undergraduate degree program which we feel is essential for an education college graduate, we need to recognize that community junior colleges employ our graduates and that part of their professional preparation program must include the academic knowledge they need. To be explicit, we must include the academic work and instructional skills in our graduate programs that will enable our graduates to present the general education competencies to community junior college students.

As a sample process:

1) secure the desired general education competencies from community junior colleges;
2) define the competencies as learner outcomes for community junior college students;
3) develop academic curricula to provide the essential content and instructional methodology to enable our graduates to present the learner outcomes to community junior college students;
4) develop content on evaluation and assessment in the curriculum to enable our graduates to evaluate the extent of learning by community junior college students.

In order to provide these academic competencies, institutions of higher education must establish better means of interaction with community junior colleges. We must know what they are doing and what they need. We need to be available to assist community junior colleges in designing and conducting research, such as this study, to determine the perceived needs of their community and employees. Both of us need to know more about the special problems that each faces and to develop a joint approach where possible. Advisory committees for community junior colleges and universities may be one approach that could work and benefit all parties.

An example in the general education area is program approval by the State Department of Education for an applied technology program. The limit of one-third of the curriculum for general education may not be appropriate. What competencies do the employers want; what competencies do the graduates need? This study indicated that they may not want 100 percent technology as higher education often assumes. Employers want employees who are people oriented, have the skills to work with people and who are equipped for further learning. Together, with solid research data from the employers, we may be able to design a better two-year curriculum in an applied technology program and then evaluate how well it works through follow-up studies. This could change the program approval requirements.

The third response to this study is to recognize the value of applied research in graduate programs. In our concern with academic quality and integrity, the tendency is to glorify theory and basic research, and downgrade practice and applied research. This study clearly shows the value of a middle ground. Using theortetical concepts on general education developed from an extensive literature review and appropriate research design and techniques that focus on an explicitly defined research problem, data can be gathered that results not in dry academic

recommendations which gather dust on a library shelf, but in a process that can result in curricula change in a community junior college and in a university. The final step is follow-through research projects to ascertain the extent of achievement of learner outcomes in community junior college students.

Community junior colleges and universities should be as concerned with retention and promotion of their graduates as with initial placement and employment. The general education competencies identified by industry in this study should assist in developing graduates who are prepared to continue their learning. This will benefit universities, community junior colleges, students and the employers of community junior college and university graduates.

Employer respondents were able to readily identify competencies which they wish to see in personnel. Managers participating in this study indicated by their responses that general education is important to the person, the corporation and the community. At least half of the respondents noted in the interview that the identified competencies were all important, but recognized the limitation of time at the two-year associate degree level necessitated some discrimination in relation to the relative importance of each. They identified the competencies as "living skills" which all people need to know to be successful, and they indicated that greater importance would be placed on these general education skills and experiences in the future due to changing technology and the advent of high technology occupations.

This research indicates that general education competencies are critically important in getting a job and in being successful on that job. Employer responses clearly demonstrate that they try to select, not train, general education competencies. Thus, they consider these competencies in hiring and promoting individuals into technical and mid-management positions.

West Virginia Northern Community College has accepted an important challenge. The College community realizes that what we say in words is seldom as rich or true as what we say in other ways. Consequently, the College is prepared to make a strong statement through action, which will culminate in a new general education program.

Branscomb, H., et al. The Competent College Student: An Essay on the Objectives and Quality of Higher Education. Nashville: Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 1977.

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